Generative AI for Economic Research: Use Cases and Implications for Economists

Abstract

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to revolutionize research. I analyze how large language models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT can assist economists by describing dozens of use cases in six areas: ideation and feedback, writing, background research, data analysis, coding, and mathematical derivations. I provide general instructions and demonstrate specific examples of how to take advantage of each of these, classifying the LLM capabilities from experimental to highly useful. I argue that economists can reap significant productivity gains by taking advantage of generative AI to automate micro-tasks. Moreover, these gains will grow as the performance of AI systems continues to improve. I also speculate on the longer-term implications of AI-powered cognitive automation for economic research. The online resources associated with this paper explain how to get started and will provide regular updates on the latest capabilities of generative AI in economics. (JEL A11, C45, D83, I23, O33)